June 12, 2016

“Called from Worry to Trust”

Matthew 6:25-34

**FCF**: Our struggle with worry

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Jesus calls us to follow Him.

(magnet) We are no longer to live in worry but in trust.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Let’s talk about the power of worry. Worry directs us. Because of something we fear, we press forward rashly or hold back cautiously. We worry over personal failure and loss of social standing. Or maybe a loss of comfort and ease, security and control. So worry directs us.

Worry also destroys us. Patterns set in that disrupt relationships. Lifestyles set in that damage our health. Research has shown that worry can cause loss of sleep or appetite, digestive disorders, a compromised immune system, and a host of other things. Worry destroys us.

With all that in mind, it would be well worth our hearing what Jesus has to say on this.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 6:25-34

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

It’s not uncommon to say or to hear certain things about our credit cards. “*They’re so easy to use*.” “*I’ll just pay it off at the end of the month*.” “*How else will I get what I want?*” Little wonder that the average U. S. household carries over $15,000 in credit card debt which runs, on average, over $2,500 a year in interest payments. And little wonder that Dave Ramsey’s Financial Peace University (FPU) has adopted the mantra, “*Debt is normal. Be weird*.”

Jesus bids us to follow Him. By that, I don’t mean that FPU is equated to the gospel. I simply mean that followers of Christ are not called to be normal. Jesus says we are to be salt and light, a city on a hill. We are to be different from the world around us. We are to be distinct even as we rub shoulders amidst the rest of the crowd. Followers of Christ are to be distinct and different from the hypocrisy of the religious. We are not to live for status. We are also to be distinct and different from the materialism of the irreligious. We are not to live for stuff.

Specifically, Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 6:19-24 that, no matter how good the things of this world may be, we have to choose between two treasures, two visions, and two masters. We looked at that last week. Jesus calls us to follow Him. As with Israel’s exodus from Egypt, He has brought us out of bondage to lesser gods, from lives of trusting and serving things that cannot save or help us. And, with that, He has brought us out of enslavement to anxious fretting.

Jesus calls us to follow Him. We are no longer to live in worry but in trust. We are no longer to live in worry but in trust. When you think about it, that is an extraordinary statement. What does it mean? To get at that, we’re going to look at it from three angles. First, what Jesus is ruling out. Second, why Jesus is ruling it out. And, third, what Jesus is then calling for.

1. **WHAT JESUS IS RULING OUT**

So, first, what is Jesus ruling out? (READ Matthew 6:25a, 34) Clearly, our thoughts and imaginations are often directed towards the future, to tomorrow. What shape are they to take?

1. *Not Our Activity*

Let’s be clear as to what Jesus is speaking of here. He is not ruling out our activity.

1. Thoughts about the future

That is, He is not ruling out our thoughts of the future, efforts at forecasting and forethought.

1. Planning for the future

Nor is He ruling out planning for the future – insurance, investments, savings, and retirement.

1. Working in the present

Nor is Jesus ruling out working now in the present. This is not permission to passivity or a call to laziness. God provides for us through the ordinary means of our work. So we are to work.

1. *But Our Anxiety*

Jesus is not ruling out our activity. What He is ruling out is our anxiety.

1. The meaning

Depending on the context, the word here can mean care and concern. Or worry and anxiety.

1. The mistake

Which is a mistake. Why? On the one hand, such worry is a waste of time and energy for the thing we fear usually never happen. And, on the other hand, even if our worst case scenario does play out, now because of our worry, we have suffered through it twice at double the cost.

So this is what Jesus is ruling out – not our activity but our anxiety.

*Illustration:*

Think of it this way. There are all sorts of visions of the future. Many recent movies are of the “dystopian” genre – which literally means “not a good place”. Think of *The Matrix*, *Mad Max*, *The Terminator*, *Robocop*, *The Hunger Games*, *Planet of the Apes*, and a host of others.

*Application:*

All “not a good place.” Here’s the thing. Whatever your vision, however entertaining and thoughtful these films may be, Christians should never have a dystopian outlook. Never.

Why? Because whatever else may be in the future, Jesus will be there. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. And He has promised to return and make all things new.

Jesus calls us to follow Him. We are no longer to live in worry but in trust.

1. **WHY JESUS IS RULING IT OUT**

But that takes us to the second point. Why is Jesus ruling this out? What does He say?

1. *Logical Arguments*

He begins with some logical arguments, appealing first to our intellect and reason.

1. From greater to lesser

(READ Matthew 6:25) This is an argument from greater to lesser. God creates our lives and bodies. Can we not trust Him to give what our lives and bodies need – food and clothing?

1. From lesser to greater

Jesus then shifts from an argument from greater to lesser to one from lesser to greater, appealing to observations in nature. (READ Matthew 6:26-27) Consider how God feeds the birds. You are so much more valuable than they. And where, my friend, does your worry really get you?

He presses on (READ Matthew 6:28-30). Consider how God adorns the flowers and grass of the field, all so fleeting and fragile. My friend, the root of your worry can only be a lack of faith.

*Illustration:*

Martin Luther put it this way with his characteristic charm (READ Stott quote):

You see, he is making the birds our schoolmasters and teachers. It is a great and abiding disgrace to us that in the Gospel a helpless sparrow should become a theologian and a preacher to the wisest of men… Whenever you listen to a nightingale, therefore, you are listening to an excellent preacher…It is as if he were saying “I prefer to be in the Lord’s kitchen. He has made heaven and earth, and he himself is the cook and the host. Every day he feeds and nourishes innumerable little birds out of his hand.”

1. *Spiritual Realities*

Which takes us from logical arguments to spiritual realities (READ Matthew 6:31-32).

1. Pagan pursuits

Those are pagan pursuits. To be preoccupied like this, to allow your life to be governed by such as this, that is consistent for someone who doesn’t know God as their Father. But you do.

1. Paternal provision

Those are pagan pursuits. But you have this paternal provision. Your heavenly Father knows your needs better than you do. And He will meet them in ways better than you can hope.

We have logical arguments and spiritual realities. That’s why Jesus rules out our worry.

*Application:*

Do you see His love for you here? Notice the breadth of the appeal. To our minds and to our reason. To our hearts and to our imaginations. Both arguments and images fully utilized.

See how He knows our need to know this. And how He longs for us to know it. All our causes for worry are being laid flat. All the fuel for our panic is being mercifully choked off.

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1. **WHAT JESUS IS CALLING FOR**

So we have what not to do and why. But what are we called to? (READ Matthew 6:33).

1. *Seeking God’s Kingdom*
2. What this means

The first thing is that we are to seek God’s kingdom. That is, His reign and rule. That which has already come and is coming in full at Jesus’ return. That is the gospel (READ Matthew 4:17).

1. What this looks like

What does this look like? Our longing to see all creation and peoples, living in glad submission to our King – as all creation and peoples were made to. And our living as heralds of our King.

1. *Seeking God’s Righteousness*
2. What this means

We are to seek God’s kingdom. And His righteousness. Meaning His commands and statutes, His rules and ordinances. A vision of justice, mercy, and faithfulness permeating all of life.

1. What this looks like

And our working towards those things in our lives and in ever-outwardly expanding circles of influence and engagement. For God clearly cares about disease, emptiness, broken relationships, poverty, injustice, and racism. God clearly cares about these things. And so should we.

1. *Trusting God’s Provision*

This is what we are to seek – God’s kingdom and His righteousness. But how are we to do this? How are we to move forward? By looking to Him. By trusting His provision.

1. We have a commission

Clearly, we have a commission. We are to seek first these things over and above all others.

1. We have been given an assurance

We have a commission. And then also an assurance – both from the same source (READ Matthew 6:33). “Seek first these things above all others. And I will provide all that you need.”

 Do you see? This is what Jesus is calling for from those who would follow Him.

*Application:*

That’s our commission and His assurance. That’s our charge and His promise. But please do note this. This is not an assurance of a life of comfort. This is not a promise of a life of ease. Think with me. Birds fall and die. Flowers and grass dry up and wither. Christians can be ostracized and persecuted. That is normal. The promise is not the absence of dark valleys. The promise is His presence with us in the dark valleys. And His provision of our truest needs.

Consider Jesus, the one speaking here, and His experience. Though this teaching was given towards the start of His ministry, it was all done under the looming shadow of the cross. Which assures us that, no matter what we may face, no matter how long and hard it may be, God’s purposes are always good. And His love is always sure. We can know and rest in that.

Which then frees us to seek first, to pursue over all else, His Kingdom and righteousness. And trust in His provision. To lay ourselves out for His purposes. And lay hold of His promises.

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**CONCLUSION:**

Jesus is speaking of preoccupation. For He knows that we are all preoccupied with something. And we can, by definition, be preoccupied with only one thing at a time. We have but so great an attention span. Our vision is wide enough to take in but so much. So, what is it?

Think of the sad story from the Cincinnati Zoo last weekend. A three-year-old boy snuck into the gorilla enclosure. He was dragged across a moat by a 450-pound gorilla named Harambe. Based on the situation and the stakes, zoo officials were forced to shoot and kill this beloved and endangered animal. And, fortunately, the boy was not seriously injured. Here’s the thing. Everyone involved with this was preoccupied with something. In that moment, everyone was seeking, wanting, pursuing one chief thing over all others. The boy wanted to see the gorilla. The parents’ attention was momentarily caught by something else. And the zoo officials were intent on making the wise though hard call. Everyone was preoccupied with something.

And so are we. What is it? What is our chief concern, our great ambition? What are we seeking after, seeking first? Is it our security? Is it food, drink, and clothing – all basic essentials of life but really just incidentals given our Father’s care? Is that what we’re living for? Or is it His rule and righteousness? Is it what He has promised has come and is coming as surely as the sun that comes dawning over the horizon? Which is it that has captured our hearts?

My friends, our confidence and trust are either in the true God or lesser gods. Our energies are given to either worship or worry. And that is tied to our hope. Is it true or false?

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